



Disaster and Emergency Management Resources

House and Building Fires - How to Protect Your Property

Install Smoke Detectors

- Smoke detectors more than double one's chances of surviving a fire.
- Smoke detectors sense abnormal amounts of smoke or invisible combustion gases in the air.
- They can detect both smoldering and burning fires.
- At least one smoke detector should be installed on every level of a structure.
- Test the smoke detectors each month and replace the batteries at least once a year.
- Replace your smoke alarms every 10 years. Smoke alarms become less sensitive over time.
- Hardwired smoke alarms are now required in new homes.
- Purchase smoke detectors labeled by the Underwriter's Laboratories (UL) or Factory Mutual (FM).

Purchase Fire Extinguishers

- Have one or more working fire extinguishers in your home.
- There are three home fire extinguisher ratings: "A" rated extinguishers are for wood or paper fires only; "B" rated extinguishers are for flammable liquid and grease fires; and "C" rated extinguishers are for electrical fires. You can get fire extinguishers that have multiple ratings. An extinguisher rated A-B-C is recommended for home use. Smaller fire extinguishers are designed for one-time use and cannot be recharged.
- Get training from the fire department or a fire extinguisher manufacturer on how to use your fire extinguisher. Fire extinguishers from various manufacturers operate in different ways. Unless you know how to use your extinguisher, you may not be able to use it effectively. There is no time to read directions during an emergency.
- Install extinguishers high on the wall, near an exit and away from heat sources. Extinguishers should be easily accessible to adults trained to use them, but kept away from children's curious hands. Heat may make the contents less effective or cause the extinguisher to lose its charge more quickly.

- If you try to use a fire extinguisher on a fire and the fire does not immediately die down, drop the extinguisher and get out. Most portable extinguishers empty in 8 to 10 seconds.
- Periodically inspect your fire extinguisher to ensure it is properly charged. Use the gauge or test button to check proper pressure. Follow manufacturer's instructions for replacement or recharging fire extinguishers. If the unit is low on pressure, damaged, or corroded, replace it or have it professionally serviced.

Consider Installing a Fire Sprinkler System in Your Home

- In less time than it would take the fire department to arrive on the scene, home fire sprinklers can contain and even extinguish a fire. There's less damage and less chance of deadly smoke and gases reaching your family. In addition, sprinkler systems can put out fire when you are away from home.
- When building a home, for about the same expenditure of installing carpet, you can install a home fire sprinkler system to safeguard your family. A good rule of thumb estimate is to add one to 1 percent to 1 ½ percent to the cost of new housing.
- Modern residential sprinklers are inconspicuous and can be mounted flush with walls or ceilings. Some sprinklers can even be concealed. Just like regular plumbing, pipes can be hidden behind ceilings or walls.
- Some insurance companies provide significant discounts when automatic fire sprinkler systems are installed.

Adapted from resource material developed by the Federal Emergency Management Agency and the National Commission for Environmental Health